**Strategic Planning**

Programs that are sustainable use strategic planning to understand where they are, where they want to go, how they will get there, and how they are making progress. Programs that use evaluation data and stakeholder input to inform their strategic planning process are significantly more sustainable than those that do not. The intentional grounding of strategic planning around lessons learned from the successes and failures of core program strategies has been found to differentiate sustainable organizations from those that struggle financially. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Strategic planning is the process by which all of the other sustainability capacity components are carried out. As such, it lies at the center of the conceptual model for sustainability capacity as it represents the glue that holds them all together. Strategic planning combines elements of all of the sustainability domains into an outcome-oriented plan. Planning also ensures that the program is well aligned with the larger external and organizational environment.

While strategic planning involves developing strategies to achieve a certain goal, it is broader in scope and much more comprehensive than organizational planning. To differentiate the two, consider the “Five Ps of strategy:”[[2]](#footnote-2)

* **Plan:** Strategy is a planned and purposeful course of intended actions or guidelines for how to get from one place to another.
* **Pattern:** Strategy is a pattern or consistency in actions and behavior over time.
* **Position:** Strategy is position within the context and environment in which the organization operates.
* **Perspective:** Strategy is collective thinking and shared vision/direction by members of the organization.
* **Ploy:** Strategy can also be a specific maneuver to overcome barriers to change.

High-quality strategic plans communicate an organization’s shared vision, mission, objectives and action plans, creating a “line of sight” from day-to-day activities to the broader mission and vision. It begins with a firm understanding of an organization or program’s strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats, and is driven by data and stakeholder input.

Key components include:

* The program plans for future resource needs.
* The program has a long-term financial plan.
* The program has a sustainability plan.
* The program’s goals are understood by all stakeholders.
* The program clearly outlines roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders.
1. York P. *The Sustainability Formula: How Nonprofit Organizations Can Thrive in the Emerging Economy.* TCC Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mintzberg, H. (1992). Five P’s for Strategy. In H. Mintzberg & J. B. Quinn (Eds.), The Strategy Process (pp. 12-19). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall International Editions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)